Project Start-Up

Introduction and Baseline Plan

Overview

Project startup is a very short process group within the project management cycle. It is a transition step between project planning and execution. While it is a short step, important events occur, including:

- Baselining and fine tuning of the project plan with management sign-off
- Commitment of resources by agency management
- Creation of a project database
- Project Kick-off meeting
- Completion at the Start-up Checklist

The project startup is a significant event in the life of a project. The project team must be formed, resources must be brought together, and the plan must be finalized.

Establish the Plan Baseline

The first steps of the project start-up process is to assign the current project manager and establish a baseline plan. Baseline refers to a plan that has been placed under configuration management so that changes to the plan are made under the change control process as discussed in *Configuration Management* within Sections III and V. The initial baselining activity is the process of assigning real dates to the project schedule.

Fine Tuning the Plan

A final tuning of the project plan typically occurs during the project start-up phase. This fine tuning consists of incorporating changes that result from management review or, in the case of a project that involves procurement, changes that result from contract negotiations. Only minor changes can be made to the plan at this time—major changes require a return to the project planning phase.

Minor changes are defined as a refinement of activities, the addition of oversight and quality activities, and alterations to the schedule based on holidays, vacations or other short-term schedule conflicts. Changes that results in more than a 5% increase in cost or schedule should be viewed as a major change.

Plan Approval

During the start-up process, the plan is finalized by the Steering Committee. At this point, resources are committed and plans are made to quickly transition to the execution phase.

The final project plan approval varies depending on the project and may require approval from the following: Steering Committee, user management, and if required, the Project Review Team of ITAB. If the effort includes contractors, it may be necessary to get the prime contractor and procurement to sign off on the revised plan.

Project Start-Up

Introduction and Baseline Plan

The Steering Committee approval represents a commitment of the organization to implement the project as described in the plan. This is a commitment to scope, schedule, budget, resources and risks.

Project Start-Up

Start-Up Check List

Overview

A good way to ensure that all start-up tasks are completed prior to actually starting the project is to use a start-up check list. The check list can be used by others to ensure that the tasks necessary to start the project are completed. A start-up check list is provided in Appendix B.

The Start-Up Check List is a combination of an action list and a tool to verify that necessary steps have been completed. This list addresses the following kinds of activities:

- Tracking and monitoring processes
- Defining what will be tracked and monitored and the format for this information
- Finalizing the schedules and formats
- Reviewing the configuration management process and ensuring the assignment of this responsibility
- Reviewing the change control and management processes and ensuring that they are implemented
- Determining how issues will be raised in the project and who will track their resolution
- Defining the risk management process
- Establishing the project environment
- Completing the project baseline
- Identifying project standards and tools
- Refining the roles and responsibilities of the project team members
- Setting expectations for the project team
- Defining all the project control processes
- Obtaining and allocating resources
- Conducting the project kick-off meeting

The project manager owns the start-up check list, although the full team provides input. In large projects, the development and completion of the start-up check list might be assigned as an administrative support function.

The project manager should feel free to add any additional items to the master list for items or activities they believe to be important.

Project Start-Up

Start-Up Check List

Format of the Start-Up Check List

The model includes status of each item. The status can be indicated as follows:

- Y = Item has been addressed and is completed.
- N = Item has not been addressed, and needs to complete the check list process.
- N/A = Item is not related to this project.
- P = Item has been addressed and some issue resolution is needed to complete the item or annotate it as "N/A".

Each item on the check list should note plans to resolve "N" or "P" entries.

The project team can choose to put this list under configuration management and it can be shared during the Kick-Off Meeting.

Kick-Off Meeting

Overview

Communication is critical to the success of any project. One key communication method is project meetings. One of the tasks that is to be completed at the start of a project is to conduct the first major project meeting, known as the project kick-off meeting. The kick-off meeting should be held prior to finalizing the project plan.

The kick-off meeting may be the most important meeting of the entire project because it allows the Project Manager to help set customer expectations. It is vitally important for the Project Manager to manage these expectations throughout the project.

Purpose of Meeting

The kick-off meeting provides a forum to:

- Publicly state that the project is beginning
- Communicate the shared view of the project
- Establish commitments by all who affect the project's outcomes, especially time commitments
- Review the goals, objectives and success factors of the project.

Who Should Attend?

This meeting is a gathering of the project team, stakeholders, executive management, and others who need to officially recognize the start of a project.

Participation in the meeting may be by representation, as opposed to every individual actually attending the meeting.

Format

The format of the meeting should be driven by:

- The size of the project
- The complexity of the project

Obviously, projects that have multiple locations involved will need close coordination for this meeting.

The timeframe is usually one to two hours and should not be viewed as a status meeting. Generally, the format is a presentation model with a question-answer time near the end of the meeting.

Kick-Off Meeting

Notification of the meeting's occurrence should be formal and in writing, again to convey the importance of the project starting. Some key stakeholders and executive management may need to be contacted prior to selecting a date to determine their schedule availability.

What Follows from Here?

People who attend the meeting should leave with a clear view of:

- The project organization and the key project staff
- The project charter -- scope, definition, and objectives
- The general schedule, budget, and activities
- The key customers and stakeholders
- The benefits these groups will realize upon completion of the project
- The challenges to completing the project, i.e. project risks
- Key activities within the next several days or weeks.

Project Start-Up

Starting Project Database

Overview

A project database is a repository of information maintained on a project. This database provides a historical record of project activities. Planned and actual activity information is maintained.

State organizations and the OIT will both be responsible for maintaining information relative to IT projects. This data collection should begin at project start-up and will be updated throughout the project until closure.

On large projects, the Project Manager presents a Status Report to CIO office every two months of the project.

Contents of the Database

The database will contain at least the following types of information:

- Project summary information
- Planned and actual financial information
- Planned and actual schedule information
- Planned and actual staffing information
- Project requirements list and requirements changes
- Project risks and mitigation measures
- Project issues and action items log
- Work Product Identification with planned and actual delivery dates
- Configuration items
- Quality audit results

How is the Historical Data Used?

Historical project data serves as a knowledge base and a repository for future project planning efforts. Any project manager can utilize this information in planning new projects. It is helpful to learn from past successes and failures, particularly if you do not desire to experience failure first hand.

> ***Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.***
> ***— George Santayana***

Resource Commitment

Overview

Once the project has been given the official go ahead, it is imperative to establish the current project team and the project environment for this project. In this stage of the project, specific individuals are assigned to planned project roles. Initially, the number of people brought to the team will be small. Groups represented on the team will probably be limited to key participants who are tasked with getting the project underway. These initial leaders will work to ensure that staff, equipment, and facility resources are in place when needed. The remaining team members are assembled later as defined in the project plan.

Development of Work Packages

Upon approval of the baselined project plan, the project manager and key task leaders begin development of the detailed work packages for each team member. These work packages describe the specific responsibilities of each team and team member.

The work package defines the specific task to be completed, identifies the budget, and indicates when milestones and deliverables are due. A work package has the following characteristics:

- Represents units of work at the level where the work is performed
- Clearly distinguishes one work package from all others
- Contains clearly defined start and end dates that represent tangible accomplishments
- Specifies a budget in terms of dollars, hours, or other measurable units
- Limits the work to be performed to a short period to facilitate tracking. This period should generally be from 8 to 80 hours of work.

See Appendix B: Forms to see a blank Project Work Assignment.

Assignment of Personnel

The project manager is concerned with properly staffing the effort with personnel that meet the skill requirements defined by the project plan. During this phase, there will be final negotiations over what personnel can be assigned and when they will be available. There may well be hiring and new employee introductions, and there may be a search for qualified experts who can assist in special problem areas. Evaluations will need to be made to determine training needs. Training will need to be scheduled and conducted, if required.

This is an extremely busy time for the project manager. Time must be made for effective communication.

This staffing period requires the attention of the project manager to ensure that new personnel are adequately briefed on the project and fully understand their roles and responsibilities. This effort is facilitated by a strong project plan, but still requires careful management by the project manager and team leaders.

Resource Commitment

Team Review of Requirements

It is beneficial to have every team member have a general understanding of the overall project. This process can be accomplished by:

- Providing documentation for the team to review
- Scheduling team meetings where the project plan is reviewed.

The meeting works well for the initial members of the team, but those personnel who are added to the project later will miss important information. For sizable projects that require large numbers of new personnel, team orientation briefings can occur frequently to review the overall scope of the effort.

Key objectives of the requirements review are to:

- Review the system specification
- Review project milestones
- Review procedures and standards that apply to the effort
- Develop an understanding of the whole system, project, program, etc.
- Call attention to specific portions of the project
- Develop buy in and ownership of the project's deliverables and schedule.

Allocation of Facility Assets

Next to staffing, adequate and timely availability of facilities and tools are needed to manage the project to match the plan. At project startup, the project manager must ensure that the facilities required for the project teams will be available when needed.

These facilities include physical floor space, office equipment, development environment, infrastructure to support the work effort, and basic supplies and equipment that personnel on the team will need to perform their assignments.

It is of paramount importance that the project manager establish an organized environment with proper office space and equipment. Poor execution of the project start-up phase results in poor team morale that can be difficult to overcome in later parts of the project, especially where project team members are left idle while waiting for delivery of products.

Tools for information technology include development hardware and tools for performing management functions such as tracking and configuration management. Many of these tools have a lead time involved in both procurement and establishment. Always remember to allow for procurement, training and testing of any needed tools.

Managing External Project Managers

Often, organizations will contract the completion of projects to outside firms who bring in their own project managers. In this case, the contracting organizations often falsely believe that an internal project manager is not required. This incorrect assumption leads to disappointment or outright project failure. It is rare that all project risks can be deflected to an outside firm.

The internal project manager needs to make sure that the vendor project manager has defined the project correctly and to your satisfaction and that you have formally approved it. The vendor must have a complete project workplan.

As the project moves forward, your project manager must be aware of the key milestone dates. There should be a formal checkpoint to ensure that the deliverables produced up to that point are complete, correct, and on time.

If there is a partial payment being made at a milestone, the internal project manager needs to ensure that the criteria for payment are defined. Depending on the nature of the project, the internal project manager may require regular status meetings and formal status reports with your external project manager.

The questions an internal project manager should ask at the beginning of the project includes:

- Is there a clear and mutual understanding of the Project Charter?
- Is there a contractual agreement that spells out the expectations of both parties in terms of deliverables to be produced, deadlines, payment schedule, completeness and correctness criteria, etc.?
- Has a comprehensive project workplan been created and approved?
- What procedures will the vendor use to control the project?
- Has the vendor been clear on what resources they need from your organization and when they will be needed?
- Have a number of milestones been established to review progress and validate that the project is on track for completion?
- Has a related payment schedule that is related to milestones been defined?
- Have short-term success factors been clearly defined and mutually agreed to?

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PROJECT START-UP